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STATEMENT FROM THE CONFERENCE ON EDUCATION FOR ALL GIRLS:

A HUMAN RIGHT, A SOCIAL GAIN

1. The nearly 300 participants from five continents who met in New York on 21 and 22 April 1992, under the auspices of the Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) Committee on UNICEF, supported the increasing emphasis of UNICEF on equal access to education of the girl child as a basic human right, as guaranteed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child and reaffirmed as a central goal at the World Conference on Education for All and the World Summit for Children.

2. The participants shared the commitment of UNICEF to child development, given the unequal access of girls to education, and are gratified by the steps UNICEF has taken, such as the collection of gender-specific data; the creation of an internal structure and programmes emphasizing the importance of women and girls; the encouragement of Governments to plan specifically for girls' education; and the staff training programmes in Africa, Asia, the Middle East and North Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean that focus on the improvement of opportunities for the girl child.

3. Conference participants stressed the need for NGOs to work in partnership with UNICEF to convey the concept that equal education for girls is not only a basic human right, but an essential factor in strengthening the family, the community and the nation, and that the self-esteem of women is

crucial to their capacity to transmit positive images of and attitudes towards women and girls to their own children.

4. In the spirit of cooperation, participants called upon UNICEF, in its work with Governments, and national and local NGOs, as well as in its educational literature, to consider the following:

(a) Recognizing the critical role of the family in human development, the participants urged UNICEF to consider the context of the entire family in formulating its policies and programmes;

(b) Recognizing that women and girls too often bear the sole responsibility for child care, the participants urged UNICEF to encourage and support government and other programmes that bolster the child-rearing roles of fathers within the family and to sensitize men and communities as well as mothers to the educational needs and rights of their daughters;

(c) Recognizing that girls are one half as likely as boys to attend school in many regions of the world, and where they do attend school are likely to complete significantly fewer years than boys, the participants urged UNICEF to increase its support for government and other programmes designed specifically to increase the number of girls that attend and remain in school. They recommended particular attention to the following supportive measures:

(i) As women are increasingly the primary or sole family earners, UNICEF is urged to support programmes that demonstrate to parents the economic value of sending girls to school and to provide the necessary support systems;

(ii) As girls spend far more time on household and family-related chores than boys, UNICEF is urged to encourage the development of educational programmes addressing girls' special needs and enabling them to function in the larger socio-economic environment by, for example, providing educational opportunities closer to their homes, offering more flexible schedules and including a child-care component for younger siblings;

(iii) As parents are frequently reluctant to send their daughters to school because of economic, physical and cultural barriers, the participants urged UNICEF to support Governments in developing innovative programmes that facilitate access to schools;

(d) Recognizing that current attitudes in schools and communities frequently lower the self-esteem of girls and discourage their participation and achievement, participants urged UNICEF to support further programmes to increase the number of competent female teachers and administrators as role models, to motivate girls and to promote the training of all teachers to treat girls in an equitable manner;

(e) Recognizing the direct relationship between a girl's education and a woman's social and economic role, UNICEF is urged to engage the full participation of women in the development of curricula, learning materials and literature in indigenous languages for children that recognize the important contributions of women;

(f) Recognizing that educational opportunities are not equally available or shared among all girls in a country, participants urged UNICEF to increase efforts to reach the most vulnerable groups, including but not limited to those who are disabled, abused, school dropouts, refugees, migrants, homeless, girls who live in rural or remote areas, and those living in extreme poverty;

(g) Recognizing that all children's learning styles vary, UNICEF is urged to support the design and development of alternative and more diverse formal and non-formal educational methods and materials;

(h) Recognizing the powerful impact of early childhood on a person's development, participants urged UNICEF to encourage and support the establishment and expansion of early childhood development programmes in all countries. These programmes should be aimed at the elimination of gender disparities during this critical stage of development;

(i) Recognizing that real progress in reducing gender disparity can be accomplished only if the above measures are implemented on a nationwide basis, the participants requested UNICEF to urge all Governments to include measures to increase girls' access to education in the preparation of their national programmes of action.

5. Members of the UNICEF Executive Board are urged to take the lead in developing and supporting such programmes in their own countries.